



Florida Guardsman

Spring 2007
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The Official Magazine of the Florida National Guard

Honor and Sacrifice

Paying tribute to
those who served

-- page 4



Storm relief

A Soldier directs traffic into a water distribution point in Central Florida after February's deadly tornadoes.

On the Cover...
Members of the Florida National Guard's Honor Guard lead a color guard and flag procession during the 2006 Veterans Day ceremony in St. Augustine. (Photo by Debra Cox)



As the sun sets, two UH-60 Black Hawk helicopters fly over a flooded landing zone created by rainstorms in Ad Diwaniyah, southern Iraq. Members of the Florida Army National Guard's 1st Battalion, 111th Aviation Regiment, were stationed at nearby Camp Echo assisting with medical evacuations. *Photo by 1st Lt. Geoffrey Fahringer.*

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Recently I was having lunch at a restaurant in Miami with seven other uniformed Guardsmen, when the waitress stopped at our table to tell us the bill had been “taken care of” by one of their patrons. A stranger had picked up the nearly \$100 tab for our barbeque lunch as a way of thanking us for serving in the military

We found out later that the gentlemen who paid the tab was the son of a military veteran.

As we began putting together this issue of the Florida Guardsman I thought again of that event. I considered the possibility that the gentleman was not only being generous and treating some Soldiers and Airmen to lunch, but might also have been reminded of his own father’s service. He might have been honoring his family’s military experience through us.

It is humbling to think that by just putting on a uniform you could remind someone – a stranger or neighbor – of their own family’s military traditions. The Florida National Guard is more than a job, a career or another government agency: it is a symbol. The National Guard — and the uniform we wear — are symbols of something much greater.

In this issue we highlight a program that pays tribute to our military lineage in Florida: the Military Funeral Honors Program. This Florida National Guard unit provides military funeral honors to more than 400 veterans each month and is one of our most visible and personal ways of paying respect and honoring those who have served and their families.

This issue also spotlights the men and women in uniform today who are carrying on the proud Florida National Guard heritage of service. Some may be helping rebuild Iraq or Afghanistan, while others are serving here in Florida and responding to the periodic natural disasters. Even those Guard members who spend their off-duty time playing competitive sports for military teams are helping build on this image and reputation.

Whatever your reason for serving and putting on the uniform, keep in mind that some people see you as more than just a Soldier or Airman. When they look at you they might see a grandfather who stormed the beaches at Normandy, or a father who died in the jungles of Vietnam, or a sister who is currently stationed in Baghdad. To them you are a reminder of past generations of Florida’s military.

And that is worth much more than a barbeque lunch.

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Florida Guardsman

The Official Magazine of the
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'Best of the Best'

FLNG selects Soldier and NCO of the Year for 2007

Sgt. 1st Class Roye Locklear of the 211th Regional Training Institute and Spc. David Spicer of the 146th Expeditionary Signal Battalion were selected as the 2007 Florida Army National Guard's Non-Commissioned Officer and Soldier of the Year, respectively.

Locklear and Spicer competed against seven other Soldiers during competition for the coveted honors Feb. 10, and were selected during a ceremony at the Kennedy C. Bullard Armory.

Soldiers competing for the title of Non-Commissioned Officer (NCO) and Soldier of the Year were judged on their physical fitness, warrior skills, land navigation, marksmanship and knowledge of military programs.

According to State Command Sgt. Maj. Robert Hosford the competition was extremely close this year.

"All of the Soldiers who competed in this year's competition were outstanding," said Hosford. "The competition to be the best of our NCOs and Soldiers is challenging, and I commend each person who competed and represented their commands."

Locklear represented Joint Force Headquarters during the NCO of the Year competition and currently serves as an instructor at the 211th Regional Training Institute at Camp Blanding.



Non-Commissioned Officer of the Year Sgt. 1st Class Roye Locklear (left) and Soldier of the Year Spc. David Spicer. Photo by Debra Cox.

He has 15 years of military service and in 2005 deployed to Afghanistan in support of Operation Task Force Phoenix as a finance mentor to the Afghan National Army. He was also selected as a member of the 2007 All-Army Soccer Team (*See story page 28*).

Spicer represented the 83rd Troop Command during the Soldier of the Year competition and is currently a tactical satellite operator for Company B, 146th Expeditionary Signal Battalion, in Pensacola, Fla. He has seven years of military service. He is a resident of Pensacola and a senior at the University of West Florida majoring in Electrical Engineering.

Also competing in this year's NCO of the Year competition were: **Staff Sgt. David Treat** representing the 50th Area Support Group; **Sgt. Pedro Perez** representing the 53rd Infantry

Brigade; **Sgt. Rory Kamenicky** representing the 83rd Troop Command; and **Sgt. Daniel Bodkin** representing the 164th Air Defense Artillery Brigade.

Also competing in the Soldier of the Year competition were: **Spc. Aidana Baez** representing the 50th Area Support Group; **Sgt. Jason Noble** representing the 53rd Infantry Brigade; and **Pvt. Nicholas Devore** representing the 164th Air Defense Artillery Brigade.

Final Honors

Military funeral program pays tribute to Florida veterans

By Staff Sgt. C.G. Maldonado
Florida National Guard Public Affairs

They are highly visible, but transparent during the solemnity of a military funeral. It is because of their presence onlookers know that a patriot is being laid to rest.

They are the members of the Florida National Guard's Military Funeral Honors Program (MFHP).

"The program offers the opportunity to provide military honors for every veteran," said retired Sgt. Maj. Daniel Blackman, program coordinator for Florida. "It's a sad, but honorable thing to do. We strive to, no matter the branch of service, make sure that every veteran gets interred with military honors."

The program was created by Congress in 2000, and after extensive planning the Florida National Guard program began in 2003.

Members of all branches of the military, whether active duty, reserve, or retired, qualify to receive military funeral honors. According to Blackman, there is a great need for the MFHP because Florida has one of the highest populations of veterans in the country.

"We do more than 400 services a month, so the average program member will sometimes do two or more services a day," said Blackman.

Initially, only about 30 people volunteered for the program and participated in 47 services the first year. Blackman made it a priority to personally embark on an aggressive recruiting campaign; today, there are more than 180 active members and retirees rendering funeral honors throughout the state.

"The program is growing and we still need to get more people in," said Blackman.

The growth of the program is evidenced by the increase in service requests, he said. And as the number of requests for military honors increases, so does the funding for the program and the need for more personnel: this year, the program received more than \$700,000 for personnel and operational costs.

"I'm really pleased with the way the program is going. It has actually grown faster than I anticipated," said Blackman. He had to employ 14 Soldiers full time and



Above: Soldiers from the Military Funeral Honors Program prepare to fire a salute during a military funeral at Florida National Cemetery in Bushnell, Fla. Photo by Staff Sgt. Thomas Kielbasa. Right: Members of the Funeral Honors program wear the Honor Guard tab on their uniforms. Photo by Staff Sgt. C.G. Maldonado.





Above: Soldiers and Airmen also serve on color guards and firing details, including the 2006 Veterans Day ceremony. Right: A Military Funeral Honors Soldier folds a flag during a funeral detail, March 2. Photos by Staff Sgt. C. G. Maldonado.

divide the state into five servicing regions in order to fulfill all the funeral requests. The locations are in Tallahassee, Orlando, Tampa, Fort Lauderdale and St. Augustine.

Men and women, officer and enlisted, prior service and retired personnel from all branches of the military can join the MFHP on a volunteer basis.

“Our goal is to increase the number of people working the program to more than 200 strong. I would especially like to welcome the help and participation of Airmen and women,” said Blackman.

To join the program, military members must be in good standing with their units, with no flags or adverse actions. They must also comply with military standards and present a professional appearance and military bearing.

Volunteers in the program are required to apply in person at any of the regional locations. Upon selection, they must attend a four-hour block of instruc-

tion, complete a course in defensive driving, and undergo one or more sessions of realistic training.

“We use a real casket for training and practice as if we were doing a real detail,” said Sgt. 1st Class Carl Davis, MFH coordinator for the St. Augustine area.

Currently, the majority of the program volunteers are in the National Guard, although there are many from the Army Reserves, Navy and Air Force. Their ranks range from private to lieutenant colonel.

Program members get one day of military pay according to their rank for a minimum of four hours, including a meal reimbursement. Additionally, they are issued one or two sets of the new Army dress blue uniform, depending on how often they work. They also receive an embroidered travel suit similar to a sweat suit for comfort during long commutes and



to keep the dress blue uniform looking fresh for as long as possible, explained Blackman.

After each service, a questionnaire is sent to Blackman grading the performance of the team during an event. He instituted this practice to ensure the team’s quality of work is up to his high standards.



Top: Soldiers escort a flag-draped casket from an airplane to a hearse during a planeside honors ceremony. Above: A Soldier prepares to present the American flag to the family of a deceased Soldier during a graveside service ceremony. The Military Funeral Honors Program performs more than 400 services each month. *Courtesy photo.*

So far, the team reviews have been excellent, he said.

"We enforce strict standards, dress and appearance. Soldiers know that when they come to the training we expect professionalism and proper protocol procedures. Conduct on the service sites is also strictly observed. From the time Soldiers arrive at the service location they must present 100 percent professionalism," said Blackman.

The reputation of the Funeral Honors Program is also growing.

"Services provided by our teams are becoming well known. Families request our service through funeral directors and through other military personnel, or call the group directly," Blackman said. He has received several letters and postcards from thankful families who have received services for their loved ones.

Whenever possible, MFHP members serve as color guards, honor guards, and firing details during other types of ceremonial events within the state. If

needed, Blackman could tap into resources such as veterans and civic organizations to satisfy all the service requests.

Although the perks of pay, travel, clothing, transportation, and retirement points are a big plus in signing people into the program, Davis said many volunteers forget about that once they join.

"When the families come up and shake your hand and you see the tears of appreciation in their faces, it gives you a sense of accomplishment in that you supported and gave that family hope by sending their loved one home with honor," Davis said. "There is nothing like that."

Volunteers interested in joining the Florida National Guard Military Funeral Honors Program can contact Sgt. Maj. (Ret.) Daniel Blackman or Sgt. 1st Class Carl Davis at (904) 823-0630. ☒



Left: The flag folding ceremony is one of the most recognizable scenes from a military funeral. The folded American flag is given to families of deceased veterans at the end of each graveside service. Photo by Staff Sgt. Thomas Kielbasa.

Honors Program member receives the service he gives

He was sitting next to his mother, watching the tears roll down her cheeks as she received the folded American flag – a flag that a moment before draped the casket of his deceased father.

This was a scene Staff Sgt. Robert Bacon has seen many times from a different perspective; as a member of the Florida National Guard Military Funeral Honors Program (MFHP), he had presented the flag to surviving family members of deceased military personnel.

But, this particular day last November Bacon himself was part of the grieving family. He understood the somber look in the sharply dressed Soldier's eyes. As the Soldier knelt before the widow and placed the flag in her shaking hands, Bacon said it was something he never expected to experience so soon.

"It was a beautiful service. It was really nice knowing that the appreciation for my father's service was there," said Bacon. "The guys (MFHP members) did a fantastic job."

Bacon joined the program after hearing about it from fellow Soldiers from A Battery, 1st Battalion, 265th Air Defense Artillery Regiment, in Palatka. He works full-time as a motor sergeant at the Field Maintenance Shop (FMS) 11 in St. Augustine and takes time occasionally to participate in funeral services in the area.

At first, Bacon's motivation to join the program was to get retirement points,

but his mindset soon changed.

"Once I got started on the program, what keeps me going is the look in the faces of the family members when we go out to service their funerals," said Bacon.

He has participated in more than 20 funerals and although he is used to the solemnity of the services, Bacon said there are some emotional moments. "It gets a little heart-wrenching at times, especially when you are presenting the flag to somebody who just lost a young Soldier," he said.

Losing his father Donald was an unexpected event for Bacon and his family.

Donald Bacon passed away from complications during heart surgery and he qualified for military honors because he served as a truck driver in the Army Reserves for two years and was activated during the Berlin buildup in 1960-61.

Being on the receiving end of a military funeral service heightened Bacon's meaning of the significance of the MFHP.

"The program gives families a good remembrance of their Soldiers' funeral. It sticks out more in your mind than just having the preacher (read a eulogy). The families feel good knowing that their loved ones were given the respect they deserved for serving their country," he said.

According to Bacon, every funeral he has serviced has been unique, but with the same outcome: "In every service that I've been to, the family members have

been really appreciative to the fact that we were there. Everybody shakes our hands after the funeral and invites us to join them for family gatherings."

After his father's passing, Bacon took a few months off from serving funerals because the pain was still fresh in his heart, but has now returned to present others the same respect.

"I feel really good about being able to honor the guys who served before me," he said.

"I work with a great bunch of people. Everybody there has always been wonderful to me and to the families we've served. It's been a fantastic experience."

As a result of his experiences as a member of the MFHP and as a recipient of military funeral honors for his father, Bacon has become an even stronger advocate of the program.

"This is an extremely important program. Every attempt by every congressman or senator we got out there to fund and maintain the program should be made."

Meanwhile, he has no intentions of leaving the MFHP any time soon. "As long as I'm capable of doing it and I'm not deployed, I'll be out there serving."

Bacon is one of approximately 170 service members and retired personnel serving in the MFHP.

-- By Staff Sgt. C.G. Maldonado



Promise of Hope

Homestead-based 930th Army Liaison Team delivers donated school supplies to orphanage in Kabul

By Tech. Sgt. Christopher DeWitt
U.S. Air Force Public Affairs

Blankets, school supplies and soccer balls made their way to hundreds of orphaned children here today thanks to a deployed Florida U.S. Army Guard unit and donations from Americans.

"This demonstrates America's compassion," said Col. Andrew Verrett, commander of the 930th Army Liaison Team, from Homestead, Fla. "We tend to be a nation of doers not talkers, and this project demonstrates that."

The items — nearly 2,000 blankets, 1,000 soccer balls and basic school supplies — made their way from the United States to Kabul, where members of the 930th planned the distribution to the Allahoddin orphanage in Kabul in November.

"We wrote to newspapers back

"We had a choice. We could have done nothing or we could have done something; ... we chose to do something."

-- Lt. Col. Abe Conn

home and used the power of the Internet," said Army Lt. Col. Abe Conn, liaison officer with the 930th. "One friend told another and so on. Before we knew it, we had received the blankets, balls and \$3,500 for shipping. The whole unit helped with planning, inflating balls and distributing the donations."

Though the items came in from across the United States, a multinational group helped deliver the goods, with Macedonian and British servicemembers

Top: Lt. Col. Abe Conn distributes blankets to children at the Allahoddin orphanage in Kabul. Above: A child gazes up at a Florida National Guard Soldier after receiving a soccer ball and school supplies. Courtesy photos.



Soldiers from the Florida National Guard (above) were part of the multinational group that distributed supplies to the children of the Allahoddin orphanage (below). *Courtesy photos.*

helping the Guard unit unload the trucks and hand the items out to the children.

"It's a sense of hope to the children who might not have any," Conn said. "It is a promise of a brighter tomorrow."

This is the second tour to the Afghan capital for the 930th. During the first, from July 2002 to March 2003, the unit raised \$7,000 and built tables and chairs for the orphanage. Conn said the unit's Soldiers remembered the children kicking cans around and decided to give them something better to kick around.

"It's a great thing to help other people, and that's what we did here today," Conn said. "We had a choice. We could have done nothing or we could have done something; ... we chose to do something." ☒





Above: Staff Sgt. Richard Chamberlain of the 1st Battalion, 265th Air Defense Artillery Regiment, prepares to toss a 56-pound weight for distance during the Northeast Florida Scottish Games and Festival, Feb. 24.

Although this was his first competition, Chamberlain finished first in his class for the weight throw. Right: Staff Sgt. Richard Chamberlain (left), Staff Sgt. Tim Forrester and Sgt. Matthew Hare pose in their military kilts during the festival in Green Cove Springs.



Heavy metal and kilts

Daytona Guardsmen shine at Northeast Florida Scottish Highland games

By Staff Sgt. Thomas Kielbasa
Florida National Guard Public Affairs

The Florida Army National Guard is not known for its strong Scottish traditions, but a team of Soldiers from the Daytona-based 1st Battalion, 265th Air Defense Artillery Regiment, is hoping to change that.

Soldiers from the unit competed in the Northeast Florida Scottish Games and Festival, Feb. 24, in Green Cove Springs, Fla., testing their mettle in seven traditional Scottish athletic events. The events included: throwing 28-pound and 56-pound weights for distance, tossing a 22-pound "Stone of Strength" and flipping an 18-foot wooden "caber" pole.

Although not required for competition, the Guardsmen wore military-print kilts and red National Guard shirts during these tests of strength.

"It's pretty addictive," Staff Sgt. Tim Forrester, who organized the Florida National Guard team, explained. "Once you pick up one of the weights you just kind of go with it."

Forrester traces his roots to medieval Scotland, but this is the first year he competed in the highland games. He plans to continue competing in similar events throughout Florida with his fellow Guardsmen rather than joining an established team made up of others from "Clan Forrester."

"Even though I'm a Forrester, the Guard's my family too," he said.

He finished first in his division during these most recent games.



Above: Chamberlain gets ready to launch a 22-pound stone. Right: Forrester attaches a special blade to his boot for balance during the competition.

Forrester's kilt was made from the Army's new digital print camouflage, while the rest of his team wore kilts fashioned from traditional Army camouflage and the U.S. Army's official tartan print.

Staff Sgt. Rich Chamberlain won both the 56-pound weight toss and "Stone of Strength" events during his first competition tries, crediting his wins to his style rather than brawn.

"Technique is more important than strength here," he noted.



Over the Horizon

Air Guard role in satellite launch offers view of the future in space

As the Air Force celebrates its 60th anniversary, Airmen from the Florida Air National Guard are paving the way into the next half-century of air and space operations.

By Staff Sgt. Thomas Kielbasa
Florida National Guard Public Affairs

Clockwise from top: A Minotaur I rocket lifts off carrying the TacSat-2 micro satellite on Dec. 16 from Wallops Island, Va. *Photo by Michael P. Kleiman, U.S. Air Force.* The 114th Range Operations Squadron's satellite dish stands out against the setting sun at Wallops Island, Va. *Photo by Staff Sgt. Thomas Kielbasa.* The Minotaur I rocket launches as the sun rises over the Virginia coast. *NASA photo.* Capt. Matthew Giles (left) and Maj. Todd Oller of the 114th observe telemetry data while preparing for the rocket launch at Wallops Island. *Photo by Staff Sgt. Thomas Kielbasa.*



WALLOPS ISLAND, Va.
– Members of the 114th Range Operations Squadron (ROPS), based at Patrick Air Force Base, traveled to Wallops Island, Va., to assist with the Dec. 16 launch of a satellite from a NASA facility – a TacSat-2 spacecraft which could assist deployed ground forces overseas with improved communications.



The 114th ROPS is one of the Florida Air National Guard's newest units.

Recently redesignated an Air Force Space Command unit, the 114th has a three-fold mission: sustaining launch operations for the Air Force, providing the Air Force Space Command with mobile range safety and telemetry tracking, and supporting satellite communications. According to 114th Operations Officer Maj. Todd Oller, the unit's mission during this December launch was to simply track and review the telemetry as the Minotaur I – a three-stage rocket carrying the satellite – when it lifted off from the Wallops Island Flight Facility in the early morning hours.

Oller said missions like this prove that the Florida Air National Guard is on the leading edge of the newest space technology and will help prove its relevance in the future.

"Operations and missions like this are why we're on the cutting edge of this movement to the future," he explained. "Sixty years ago we became an Air Force. We've transitioned now to an Air and Space force and in the future we will continue to heavily rely on space-based assets. We continue to transition to more and more space-related missions...we're leaning forward to dominate that battlefield."

Members of the 114th noted this was the first time their unit partnered

with NASA resulting in the Ballistic Missile Range Safety Technology system (BMRST) receiving certification on a federal launch range.

"The 114th is operating the BMRST...which receives and records telemetry from a vehicle and then provides command destruct capability," Oller explained.

Although the 114th was not tasked with the command destruct capability during the December launch, during future missions they may be called upon to destroy a rocket if it goes off course and threatens public safety.

Oller added even with the increasingly complicated and improved technology used by the Air Force, the Airmen who operate the technology are still the most important part of units like the 114th.

"We can have all the technology, we can have all the aircraft and the spacecraft, but obviously it is the people (that are the greatest assets)," he said. "The technology may never be smart enough to operate itself or to make critical decisions."

114th Deployment Commander Capt. Matthew Giles agreed that even with continual upgrades to technology, the unit's strength will continue to derive from the human element – the Airman. ☒

More than four centuries of military service

More than 440 years ago a small contingent of Spanish soldiers and civilian settlers gathered in Florida with the intent of defending their newly founded settlement of St. Augustine.



Top: Florida Army National Guard infantry Soldiers form up in 1912. *Archive photo.*
Above: A military re-enactor portraying a Spanish soldier fires a vintage rifle next to a modern howitzer during a ceremony at the Florida National Guard headquarters. *Photo by Staff Sgt. Stephen Hudson, Florida National Guard Public Affairs*

Florida has the oldest militia tradition of any state in the continental United States. From the Panhandle to the Keys, the state's military history is a long and proud tradition that extends from the first Spanish settlers to today's modern Florida National Guard.

More than 440 years ago a small contingent of Spanish soldiers and civilian settlers gathered on the banks of a wild, sub-tropical inlet in Florida with the intent of defending their newly founded settlement of St. Augustine.

Their goal was to drive away French soldiers from nearby Fort Caroline (north of present-day Jacksonville) and secure the King of Spain's claim to the New World. This group of about 50 civilian-soldiers formed a militia that is considered the historical "roots" of the Florida National Guard. Because this predates the celebrated 1636 "first muster" of colonial militia in Massachusetts – and the birth date of the modern National Guard – the true beginnings of Florida National Guard are actually more than 70 years older than the rest of the National Guard!

For nearly 200 years the Spanish governed Florida and defended its



Florida Army National Guard Soldiers from the 124th Infantry Regiment train at Ft. Benning, Ga., in 1943. *Archive photo.*

settlements with militia Soldiers, until the area briefly became an English possession in 1763. Florida Citizen-Soldiers assisted the British military during the American Revolutionary War, but when Florida reverted to Spain again in 1783, the militia once again embraced its Spanish heritage.

In 1821 Spain transferred ownership of Florida to the United States and for the first time those militiamen who served under the Spanish and British were American Citizen-Soldiers. Throughout the 19th Century members of the militia served in several conflicts beginning with the bloody Second Seminole War in 1835 and continuing through the Mexican War, American Civil War, and the Spanish-American War.

The Florida National Guard was instrumental in the major military conflicts of the 20th Century. Florida Soldiers were engaged during both World Wars and served honorably in the Korean and Vietnam conflicts and Operation Desert Shield/Storm in 1991.

The founding of the Florida Air National Guard in 1947 added to the state's proud militia tradition and paved the way for 60 years of service by Citizen-Airmen. Members of the 159th Fighter Squadron participated in the Korean War and during the next 40 years the Florida Air National Guard remained an integral part of America's defense during the "Cold War."

Since 2001 more than 9,000 Florida National Guard Soldiers and Airmen have been activated in the Global War on Terrorism and have continued the military

tradition begun by the Spanish in the 1500s. Many are currently serving in global hotspots including Afghanistan and Iraq.



Re-enactors portray historical Florida military personnel during the annual Military Appreciation Day at the Florida Capitol, April 2006. *Courtesy photo.*

Legislators honor Florida military history

Florida's military history is recognized as one of the oldest and richest in the nation. Last year the state's House of Representatives paid tribute to Florida's military history during its annual Military Appreciation Day in Tallahassee.

Re-enactors portraying military personnel from the 1500s to present day dressed in period costume and were applauded by members in the House

chamber, as part of the tribute to Florida's ongoing military heritage. According to Florida Rep. Stan Jordan the purpose of the annual event is to pay tribute to the "brave men and women who have and are still ensuring our freedoms and helping spread liberty, (and to) educate and energize the members in the House chamber as they prepare to vote on many of the military and veteran related bills."

Blown Away



When violent storms tore through Central Florida on Feb. 2, the Lady Lake Church of God was leveled by a tornado that literally tore the building to pieces. A day later parishioners were wading through rubble and debris that hardly resembled the 30-year-old church, trying to clear an area in time for Sunday morning services.



Top: Parishioners of the Lady Lake Church of God remove a damaged cross from their church. **Above:** Pastor Larry Lynn surveys the damage to his church which was destroyed during the Feb. 2 tornadoes.

Wearing a dusty and sweat-stained jacket, parishioner William Countryman crawled in and out of the ruins on Saturday afternoon, ducking under twisted sheet metal and remnants of insulation in search of pieces of the church's Christmas nativity set.

"When we find the manger it's going to mean a lot to the church and the pastor," Countryman, who has been a parishioner for nearly a decade, explained as he pulled back broken boards in search of the white and gold-colored nativity set.

"It might take me a couple of hours, but I'll find it," he said. Less than an hour later he emerged carrying a battered cardboard box with "Nativity Set" written on the side in black marker.

Nearby Pastor Larry Lynn watched the members of his congregation sift through the damaged church and remove splintered tree limbs from its front yard. He said although the church's structure was destroyed, there were no injuries in his 232-member congregation.



Gov. Charlie Crist (left) and FEMA Director David Paulison survey the damage over Lady Lake, Fla., from a National Guard helicopter. *FEMA photo.* Below: A Guardsman helps distribute supplies to storm victims in Lake Mack, Fla.

“The Church is still solid and strong – it’s just the building that’s gone,” he said. “We’ll rebuild.”

Governor Charlie Crist declared a state of emergency in four Florida counties damaged by the storms and on Friday and Saturday rode in a Florida National Guard UH-60 Black Hawk helicopter to assess the damage from the air. He also toured devastated areas with Adjutant General of Florida Douglas Burnett, Federal Emergency Management Agency Director David Paulison and state and federal lawmakers.

“When I came down here yesterday morning for the first time I just couldn’t believe it...,” Crist said during a press conference at the Church of God on Saturday. “We’ve had a lot of hurricanes the past few years in our state, but the intensity of these tornados is remarkable.”

Twenty-one people died in areas affected by the storms.

The Florida National Guard dispatched more than 40 Soldiers from the 2nd Battalion, 124th Infantry Regiment, to help in the recovery effort. The Soldiers assisted emergency responders on Saturday by operating three ice and water



distribution points in Lady Lake and nearby Paisley, Fla.

According to one of the Florida National Guard helicopter pilots who flew the governor during his damage assessment flights, “there was a lot of destruction,” but from the air it looked isolated to a narrow path.

“It is a lot like what I’ve seen on

every hurricane I’ve worked since Hurricane Andrew (in 1992),” said Chief Warrant Officer John Rawls of Bravo Co., 1st Battalion, 171st Aviation Regiment. “The only difference is that this is a concentrated area. Outside of that it is undisturbed... with a hurricane a massive area is destroyed.” ☒

Leader of the Band

Warrant officer is state's longest serving commander

By Staff Sgt. Thomas Kielbasa
Florida National Guard Public Affairs

When Chief Warrant Officer Douglas Phifer took command of his unit in April 1978, disco dancing was still popular, Jimmy Carter was president, and a postage stamp only cost thirteen cents.

Now, nearly 30 years later, Phifer is still in charge of the Miami-based 13th Army Band and is the longest serving commander in the Florida Army National Guard.

"I've been commander of the same unit since that time," Phifer, 57, said. "It has been quite a lengthy stay."

Phifer's longevity as a unit commander is unheard of in most National Guard units, according to 50th Area Support Group Commander Col. Joseph Duren.

"This is very unusual, because normally unit commanders are rotated out after three or four years," Duren explained. "We do that to continually develop new leaders. But the band is a unique unit with a warrant officer as a commander and Mr. Phifer has tremendous talent and passion of leading."

Phifer enlisted in the military in 1971 while he was a junior attending the University of Miami and after receiving a degree in music education joined the 13th Army Band as a tuba and trombone player and associate conductor. Six years later Phifer took command of the band and was commissioned as a warrant officer by Col. Robert Ensslin – who later served as Florida's Adjutant General.

To most people who have seen the band play, Phifer is a familiar site with baton in one hand and leading the Soldiers through songs from the "Star-Spangled Banner" to "God Bless America."



Top: As an enlisted Soldier Phifer (second from left) plays the trombone in the Army Band. **Above:** Chief Warrant Officer Douglas Phifer conducts the 13th Army Band in the early 1980s. *Photos courtesy of 13th Army Band.*



Left: When he's not conducting the 13th Army Band, Chief Warrant Officer Douglas Phifer is Director of Marketing and Special Projects for Miami-Dade County Public Schools. He also teaches introductory computer classes for a local community college. *Photo by Staff Sgt. Thomas Kielbasa.*

"The main purpose of a commander in a band unit is conducting," Phifer explained. "Musicians don't just get up and play – they have to be trained on what they're playing."

In addition to his National Guard service, Phifer is Director of Marketing and Special Projects for Miami-Dade County Public Schools, and teaches "Introduction to Computers" on-line for Miami-Dade Community College.

He highlighted the differences between instructing Army band members and teaching his college students, noting that the standards for military musicians are more stringent.

Phifer said that if his students missed five percent of their exam questions, they would still easily pass, but it would be a different story for the 13th Army Band members: "If the bandmen missed five percent of the notes they play, or played them at the wrong time, I'd be fired."

He said that because the 13th Army Band plays so many high-profile events – including Florida governors' inaugurations and major National Guard conferences, their performance is always under scrutiny.

"Maybe one of the things we learn from being a bandsman is that we have to be as close to perfect as possible," he noted. "...We try to strive for perfection."

Phifer estimated less than 25 percent of the 55 Soldiers in the band are professional civilian musicians, but the majority have full-time jobs ranging from corrections officer to insurance salesperson. The

band itself is arranged into five teams – two ceremonial teams, a Latin band, a rock group and a stage band – and can be broken out to play different events simultaneously.

During Phifer's command the 13th Army Band has performed for several U.S. presidents, U.S. and foreign dignitaries and even played as far away as Morocco, Panama and Costa Rica. Phifer has also participated in every Florida governor's inauguration during the last 32 years, including the most recent inauguration of Gov. Charlie Crist on Jan. 2.

"A lot of people will say the band director is an easy gig, but the fact of the matter is it is a hard job; you get very tense about whether something is going to be played right during a ceremony," Phifer said.

He also noted that the hours invested by all the band members each year are incredible and it is not unheard of for his musicians to put in a twenty-hour day in support of a band engagement. During one of these marathon days they leave their homes at five or six in the morning, travel all day, rehearse, set up the instruments for the show, perform until nine or ten o'clock at night, breakdown the instruments, go to sleep and the next morning get right back up and travel home or to the next performance.

"The public just sees that three or four hours you're sitting there playing and doesn't see all that prep-time or the logistics involved," Phifer explained.



Above: Phifer has been Commander of the 13th Army Band since 1978, making him the longest serving commander in the Florida National Guard. *Photo courtesy of 13th Army Band.*

Florida National Guard 'Transition Team' braves attacks to train Iraqi police

By Spc. Daniel Bearl
25th Combat Aviation Brigade

The morning is chilly as Sgt. Alexis Medina briefs his squad on its mission.

Medina and his Soldiers, from the Florida National Guard's Company D, 2nd Battalion, 124th Infantry Regiment, are one of several squads that make up the police transition team working in Tal Afar, Iraq. Their mission is to see that the Iraqi police are properly trained so they can operate on their own.

As they prepare to go to a meeting with local Iraqi police leaders, Medina updates his squad on route conditions and recent enemy activity.

Once he's done, the Soldiers don their protective armor and climb into their vehicles. It's a short drive to the police station, but recent suicide bomb attacks give reason for extra caution and vigilance as they roll out.

This particular mission is nothing new to these Soldiers, though.

"We go out a minimum of five days a



Above: Sgt. Alexis Medina takes notes while meeting with Iraqi police officers. Below: 2nd Lt. Ryan Swinford talks with Iraqi police officers in Tal Afar.

week to (Iraqi Police) stations," Medina said. "We train them up on essential tasks that they need to become effective Iraqi security forces throughout the sector."

Their destination is what they appropriately call "the Castle." It's an impressive stone structure complete with walls and ramparts that sits on a hill overlooking Tal Afar. It was built by British forces during their colonial occupation of Iraq a century ago. Inside is a compound for Iraqi army, Iraqi police and coalition forces.

Working with the Police Transition Team (PTT) are civilian police assistant teams, which comprise civilians with backgrounds in law enforcement, to help the Iraqis learn the skills they need to provide security for their communities.

The PTT's job is one of oversight, to allow the Iraqi police to do their job while providing professional training and support, Medina said.

That doesn't mean these troops don't see plenty of action. While they're

waiting for their meeting to start, a bout of explosions are heard outside the compound. Insurgents have fired a barrage of mortars into the neighborhood near the Castle.

Medina and his squad are quick to react as they jump back in their vehicles to go help the Iraqis search the area the mortars came from.

Though there are some cultural challenges and progress is sometimes slow, the police forces of Tal Afar have been doing comparatively well, Medina said.

The police stations are regularly graded on their progress in force protection, equipment maintenance, and command and control as well as other areas, Medina said. Once they have achieved certain criteria, they are deemed able to operate autonomously. In Tal Afar, several of their stations are close to autonomy, Medina said.

In addition to training, the PTT also provides some logistical support to the



Iraqis, even though they are now mostly responsible for their own supply management.

Their training and level of confidence is apparent when, after Medina and his squad have returned from reacting to the mortar attack, Iraqi police bring in a sack full of explosives and a rocket-propelled grenade launcher that they had seized from insurgent gunmen that morning.

A few days after meeting with the local police leaders, Medina and his squad were preparing to take supplies to coalition soldiers manning the Castle when they receive a call that Iraqi police were engaged with insurgent fighters and were running short on ammo.

Before rolling out, the squad grabs several crates of ammunition to help resupply the embattled Iraqi police. Sporadic firefights have been ongoing for several days in the city, so Medina emphasizes that everyone in the convoy must remain alert and cautious.

Sudden mission changes like this, which can turn a relatively routine mission into something much more dangerous, are common for the Soldiers, but they drive on regardless.

After they finish their supply mission, the squad drives to a nearby police station, where civilian trainers with them conduct an impromptu class with the police officers there.

Speaking through an interpreter, the trainers instruct the Iraqis on proper care and handling of their weapons, while Medina meets with their leaders to discuss issues they have that need to be addressed.

After the class, the squad heads back to base. Clouds have rolled in to cover the sky and a rapidly setting sun casts the world in the gray light of twilight. The chill of winter seeps into the heavily armored Humvees and the city is eerily quiet. It's clear that everyone is eager to get back to base and get some rest. They haven't encountered any hostile gunfire - this time.

"It's been a long week," Medina said, without going into further detail.

Despite the hazards, long hours and unexpected mission changes, Medina finds merit in his work.

"The most rewarding part of the mission is knowing we're doing something that is going to permanently affect the country," Medina said.



Senior Airman Lance Vogel song of the 557th Expeditionary RED HORSE Squadron installs beams on a maintenance hut during a construction project in Southwest Asia. Photo by Staff. Sgt. William Nicholls.

Air Guard engineers assist with warfight in SW Asia

SOUTHWEST ASIA — The 557th Expeditionary RED HORSE Squadron (ERHS), which includes members of the Florida Air National Guard, recently played a major role in assisting the ongoing Global War on Terrorism.

By renovating buildings in Southwest Asia the members of the 557th helped provide room for A-10 Warthog ground attack jets and their maintenance crews. According to Col. Patrick Malackowski, commander of the 438th Air Expeditionary Group and the A-10 Warthog aircraft, his jets are more maneuverable and can observe more on the ground than a helicopter, making them relevant to any combat.

The renovation project included moving a group of Marines from one building and converting it into an A-10 hangar and constructing a 32-foot by 120-foot hut for maintenance.

"We had to convert another hardened aircraft shelter into billeting for the Marines; so the crew built forty bedrooms in a hardened aircraft shelter from scratch, then went back to the ones the Marines had been living in, gutted it, and converted it to aircraft use," said Master Sgt. Michael Judd of the 557th. "The crew did more in less time than I had any right to expect. We finished all projects ahead of deadline,

including the first one. We thought we were going to have to extend the deadline when we first arrived. We did not extend the deadline, and instead, the crew finished it a day early!"

The A-10 is designed for close air support of ground forces by attacking tanks, armored vehicles and other ground targets. The primary weapon system of the A-10 is the 30-mm Gatling gun, capable of firing 3,900 rounds per minute.



Members of the 557th Expeditionary RED HORSE Squadron (which includes Airmen from the Florida Air National Guard's 202nd RED HORSE Squadron) pose in front of an A-10 Warthog in Southwest Asia. The group helped renovate buildings used to support the A-10 crews and equipment. Courtesy photo.



‘Florida Heroes’ recognized for War on Terrorism service



Members of the Florida Army and Air National Guard were honored during three Salute to Florida Heroes events in Tampa, Panama City (top) and Miami (above). The day-long events drew more than 2,500 Soldiers and Airmen, along with their families and friends, as formal recognitions of their selfless service in the Global War on Terrorism. The majority of the military members honored had served in Iraq and Afghanistan. *Photos by Staff Sgts. C. G. Maldonado and Thomas Kielbasa.*

More than 2,500 members of the Florida National Guard who served overseas were honored at three “Salute to Florida Heroes” events last year.

The events were held in Tampa (Oct. 21), Miami (Dec. 1), and Panama City (Dec. 9). During each event civic leaders and elected officials joined Florida National Guard leaders in praising the Guard members and their families.

“It’s a great day to be a Soldier,” said Civilian Aide to the Secretary of the Army Brig. Gen. (Ret.) Michael Ferguson at the Panama City event. “Every place you go, everybody knows who you are because you are the bravest and the finest. It is a pleasure and there is no greater honor than to be with you; this band of brothers.”

At the same event Adjutant General of Florida Maj. Gen. Douglas Burnett thanked the troops for “a job well done” and noted that people throughout Florida appreciate their service.

“You’ve performed it magnificently,” he said. “Everywhere I travel in the Army or the Air Force, they say the Florida National Guard ‘gets it’, and we get it because of our Soldiers...and we thank you for that.”



Above: Members of the 1st Battalion, 124th Infantry Regiment, receive the Valorous Unit Award, Dec. 2. Photo by Staff Sgt. Thomas Kielbasa. Below: The unit continues training for future operations at Avon Park, Fla. Photo by Spc. Andrew Hillegass.

Miami-based infantry unit recognized for successful actions in Iraq

By Staff Sgt. Thomas Kielbasa
Florida National Guard Public Affairs

MIAMI – A Florida National Guard infantry unit was recognized for its heroic actions in Iraq and presented with an award by Florida leaders during a December ceremony in South Florida.



The Miami-based 1st Battalion, 124th Infantry Regiment, was given the Valorous Unit Award, Saturday, Dec. 2, as part of the “Salute to Florida Heroes” event at the Miami Metro Zoo. The award was presented in the form of a streamer to the unit’s guidon during the ceremony.

The Valorous Unit Award is presented to units of the U.S. Armed Forces for extraordinary heroism in action against an armed enemy of the United States.

In 2003 more than 550 Soldiers from the 1st Battalion, 124th Infantry Regiment, deployed in support of Operation Iraqi Freedom, crossing into Iraq in May and subsequently providing security and combat operations in hotspots including Baghdad and Ar Ramadi. During its 291 days of continuous combat operations the unit received 56 Purple Hearts, but suffered no casualties.

During its deployment the unit’s

impressive accomplishments included: 7,716 separate missions; 4,880 patrols (dismounted, mounted, river); recovery of nearly 2,400 small arms weapons, 112 missiles, and 715 Improvised Explosive Devices (IEDs); and confiscation of more than \$467,000 in U.S. currency. Additionally, the unit helped rebuild or renovate two hospitals, 11 government buildings, 25 schools and 18 mosques. The U.S. Soldiers also helped hire and train more than 3,700 police officers and 200 Highway Patrol Officers.

The 1st Battalion, 124th Infantry Regiment, returned to the United States in March 2004. ☒

'Firing Line'

Training on the Island of Enchantment

By Staff Sgt. C.G. Maldonado
Florida National Guard Public Affairs

CAMP SANTIAGO, Puerto Rico - Military training -- technical or tactical -- is the bread and butter of every American Soldier. In the Florida Army National Guard, performing these required tasks can become an uneventful routine.

That is why, to shake things up a little, the leadership of the 254th Transportation Battalion in West Palm Beach decided to literally take their Soldiers out 'for a ride' to Puerto Rico, the Island of Enchantment, last Fall.

Soldiers from the 254th Transportation Battalion and its subordinate units - the 715th and 806th Military Police Companies from Fort Pierce, and the 1218th Transportation Company from West Palm Beach - participated in the training exercise.

According to Sgt. 1st Class Walter Tovani of the 715th Military Police Company the main reason for flying more than 200 Soldiers via military aircraft for training in the Caribbean island was to boost morale and also for retention purposes.

"This is what keeps Soldiers motivated, this is what they want to do; they want to get out there, stay active and do different things," Tovani explained. "I hope we get to do more of it. At first, they had reservations about it because it's new, something they haven't done before. But now they are excited to have done it." Sgt. 1st Class Robert Dillard, a platoon sergeant with the 715th, said the training was a great opportunity for his unit to train outside of Florida, but moving such a large number of troops outside of the continen-



Soldiers from the 254th Transportation Battalion shoot their M9 pistols during range qualification training in Puerto Rico. Photo by Spc. Marizol Ruiz, 113th MPAD.

tal United States took a lot of resources and coordination.

"The collaboration between the National Guards of Florida and Puerto Rico was fantastic," he said. "The personnel at Range Control in Camp Santiago were absolutely very courteous and professional in helping us in anything and with any issues that we had. It's been a very good working partnership."

The Soldiers practiced with a variety of firearms including the M9 pistol, M-16 rifle, M203 grenade launcher, M249 squad automatic weapon, and the M1200 Winchester shotgun.

Brig. Gen. Steve Villacorta, commander of the 164th Air Defense Artillery Brigade in Orlando, visited the troops during their qualification rounds. "Getting an opportunity to come to Puerto Rico and Camp Santiago to work on the ranges here is quite a different experience from being at the other locations that we've been at," he said.

A total of seven ranges were "hot" or open during three days for qualification with the different weapons, some of which were also fired at night. In the end, more than 80 percent of the troops who fired received a qualifying grade. ☒

Around Florida



During training at Live Oak, Soldiers from the 146th Expeditionary Signal Battalion receive a class on the Regional Emergency Response Network (RERN), which can provide communications support during emergencies. Photo by Spc. Blair Heusdens.

New equipment gets responders 'in sync' for emergencies

By Spcs. Blair Heusdens
and Carmen Steinbach
107th Mobile Public Affairs Detachment

LIVE OAK, Fla. (Feb. 11) – The Florida National Guard has added a new capability to improve speed and communications during crises such as natural disasters and terrorist attacks.

The 146th Expeditionary Signal Battalion based in Jacksonville, Fla., recently received several new pieces of communication equipment that will improve interactions between state agencies and local authorities during emergencies by allowing them to communicate with each other more effectively.

During a field training exercise Feb. 9-11, Soldiers from the 146th established a communications link between four North Florida sites in Quincy, Live Oak, Marianna and Camp Blanding. The Soldiers used the exercise as an opportunity to test the new equipment and update their training on the

unit's tactical satellites and Tropo Scatter Microwave System.

One of the new systems tested was the Regional Emergency Response Network or RERN, which uses a variety of frequencies to provide defense support to civilian authorities in times of state-wide emergency. The RERN is capable of providing high-speed Internet connectivity to 40 computers and laptops, signal strength for hand-held radios and provide a city with a minimum amount of electricity at full-capacity for two and a half days using only two diesel-fueled generators.

"It's like Tropo on steroids," said Sgt. 1st Class Thomas Aycock of the 146th Expeditionary Signal Battalion, comparing the RERN to their existing Tropo Scatter Microwave System.

According to unit members, the 2005 Florida hurricanes demonstrated the need to establish quick communications and the importance of cooperation between responding agencies. National Guardsmen can now move into an affected area and


set up power, phones and Internet services – providing a hub for all other responders.

"The equipment was designed to allow us to interact with local authorities and let them talk to each other through us," said Capt. Adrian Johnson, commander of the 146th's Company C.

The equipment also has video teleconferencing capabilities, enabling visual communication between leaders and Soldiers in the field.

The battalion received the new equipment as part of the Army's transformation initiative to make units more prepared to adjust to changing mission requirements.

"This new equipment will allow us to communicate from the foxhole to the president," said Johnson.

Purchased from civilian contractor Applied Global Technology for \$500,000, the RERNS are maintained and updated regularly at Camp Blanding Joint Training Center. 

Field of Honor

Fallen Soldier laid to rest in Ohio

By Staff Sgt. C.G. Maldonado
Florida National Guard Public Affairs



WARREN, Ohio (Dec. 15) - The weather was unusually clear and pleasant according to many of the local residents who convened at the Grace A.M.E. Church on Dec. 15 to pay their respects to Sgt. Marco Miller, a fallen hometown hero.

More than 350 people filled the church to capacity for a memorial service in which they sang, prayed, and celebrated

Miller's life.

"Welcome to the homegoing celebration of brother Sgt. Marco Miller," said Rev. Kevin Parks, pastor of the church.

Miller, 36, was a member of 3rd Battalion Support Company, 20th Special Forces Group (Airborne), based in Camp Blanding, Fla. Deployed as a chemical specialist and combat cameraman, he died Dec. 5 in Landstuhl Germany after being wounded in a mortar attack near Taji, Iraq. He was an organ donor.

The vast congregation present at the church included family, friends, clergy from several area churches, and military and government officials.

Warren Mayor Michael J. O'Brien, Miller's girlfriend Misty Franklin, and brother Charles William read eulogies highlighting Miller's virtues and describing the profound effect his passing has had in the town that watched him grow.

"Nothing can fill the vacuum of his death, but drop by drop, pain is replaced with pride," said O'Brien.

A presentation of military honors followed, in which Miller was presented several posthumous awards: the Meritorious Service Medal, Bronze Star, Florida Cross, Combat Action Badge, Florida State Active Duty medal, and the Purple Heart. He also received the Chemical Corps' highest award, the Order of the Dragon.

Brig. Gen. Timothy Sullivan, commander of the Florida National Guard's 83rd Troop Command, read a letter written by Spc. Robert A. Radice, Miller's roommate in Iraq. Part of it said:

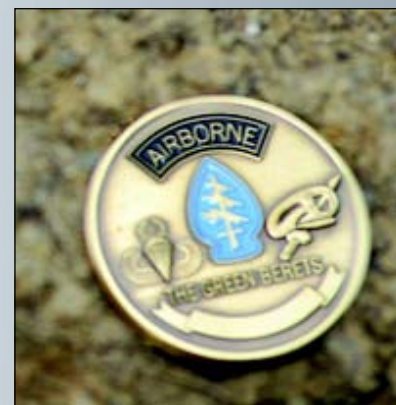
"For those of you who knew (Miller)



Top: Special Forces Soldiers pay their respects during Sgt. Miller's funeral in Ohio. Above: Members of community lined the streets of Warren, Ohio, and waved flags during the funeral procession for Sgt. Miller.



Left: Sgt. Marco Miller was deployed to Iraq with the 3rd Battalion, 20th Special Forces Group. Members of the unit left a Special Forces coin (below) in the soil near Miller's grave, and Brig. Gen. Timothy Sullivan presented an American Flag to Miller's girlfriend (bottom) during the Dec. 15 funeral in Ohio.



remember that big smile and his cool demeanor. For those of you who don't know him, remember this: He was one awesome guy. And as big as he was, he was selfless, self-made, and self-confident. Last, but not least, he was an American Soldier."

Accompanying Sullivan were more than 20 Soldiers, some of them from Miller's unit, who flew to Warren for a last farewell to their brother in arms.

"He was very professional in his duties, always there for the junior Soldiers," said 1st Sgt. Kevin Booth, one of the leaders of the group. "He was a quiet man, but he always was willing to help."

After the memorial service, Miller's body was solemnly placed in a horse-drawn glass carriage to be transported nearly six miles to Oakwood Cemetery- its final resting place.

Along the way, hundreds of citizens flooded the sidewalks proudly holding American flags, banners, and printed images of Miller.

"The town's support was incredible," said Brig. Gen. Sullivan.

Store signs displayed messages of support and gratitude. Many spectators cried as they watched the casket draped in an American flag go by. Children saluted as adults tried to explain to them what was taking place.

At the gravesite, Sullivan presented American flags to Miller's family, including the mother of Miller's four-month-old daughter. Miller deployed overseas before his daughter was born; he never met her.



Part of the full military honors ceremony included a flyover by a CH-47 Chinook helicopter.

The Special Forces Soldiers from Florida carried Miller's casket to its burial plot and took turns depositing part of the soil that would cover his remains along with a Special Forces coin, insignia and badge.

"This is a sign of brotherhood,"

explained Staff Sgt. Ismael Cuadrado, training non-commissioned officer of the 708th Component Repair Company based in Camp Blanding, and former colleague of Miller. "(Miller) was one of us; a true member of this fraternity. He always wanted to find the best in people. He wanted to know the better part of you."

Focus on People



Top: Sgt. 1st Class Roye Locklear (right) runs alongside an opposing player during the January tournament. **Above:** With Locklear's help, the Army outscored the Navy 2-1. *Photo by Staff Sgt. C. G. Maldonado.*

Florida Guardsman 'kicks it' with the All-Army soccer pros

By Staff Sgt. C.G. Maldonado
Florida National Guard Public Affairs

JACKSONVILLE, Fla. — After fighting the War on Terrorism on the battlefields of Afghanistan just last year, Sgt. 1st Class Roye Locklear found himself fighting for victory on a different field — a soccer field.

Locklear was battling against opponents from other branches of the military as part of the All-Army men's soccer team during the Armed Forces Tournament held in Jacksonville January 16-22.

"I thought we played extremely well. All of the service teams played at a high level of skill," said Locklear. His team endured six games in six days against the

Navy, Air Force, and the Marines. Locklear's team kicked its way to a 6-0 record capturing the gold medal.

Getting to be part of such an elite group of athletes was a battle on its own for Locklear: he was a professional soccer player who suffered what most people would have considered a career-ending knee injury while playing for the Cyclones, an A-League soccer team based in Jacksonville that formed in 1995 and remained in existence until 1999.

"I tore a couple of ligaments on my knee in 1998 and that pretty much ended my professional career," he said. "I had to have multiple surgeries to get it back in working order."

In addition to all the surgeries, Locklear went through extensive rehabilita-

tion work just to get back to the point where he could run and maintain Army standards.

"I didn't think I could get back to the level I used to play at just because my knee is not at 100 percent, but I've worked pretty hard to regain the strength and the flexibility that goes with it in order to get to a point where I could compete at the All-Army level," he said.

Locklear began playing soccer at age 5 and the sport has been a constant in his life. Now at 36, he said making it to the All-Army team this year is a goal he has been trying to reach for the past four years. He was the only member of the Florida National Guard and made the cut among Soldiers whose average age was 25.

Although he was not selected for the all-star team - a meticulous selection of players from the different service branches that competed in the Armed Forces Tournament - Locklear plans to apply for the Army team again next year. He hopes to make it all the way to the top, despite chronic arthritis in his knee. For now, he has other plans directly related to soccer and his most adoring fans.

"My immediate plans are to begin coaching the youth teams of three of my daughters and I'm looking forward to working with them over the next few months," said Locklear.

Besides his activities as a soccer player, Locklear has a very active military life: he deployed to Afghanistan with the 53rd Infantry Brigade as a finance mentor to the Afghan National Army in 2005.

Shortly after returning from his mission overseas, Locklear resumed his full-time duties as a community coalition representative for the Florida National Guard's Counterdrug program.

"My reason for wanting to work with coalitions from across the state is to create a better Florida," he said. "Things such as substance abuse, drugs, and suicide are quite prevalent throughout the state and our Counterdrug program, along with community based organizations from around the state, seeks to combat these issues. I don't want my children growing up in areas where these types of influences are available."

In February Locklear was also selected as the Florida Army National Guard's Non-Commissioned Officer of the Year for 2007, representing Joint Force Headquarters. (See story page 3).



Sgt. 1st Class Clemons during his Afghanistan deployment. *Courtesy photo.*

How to make a difference *Soldier sets Equal Opportunity precedent during deployment*

By Sgt. 1st Class C.G. Maldonado
Florida National Guard Public Affairs

Soldiers are assigned and deployed according to the needs of the Army, and because the needs of the Army are so broad, oversights are possible.

But that is when a Soldier like Sgt. 1st Class Earnest Clemons can make a difference.

Clemons, a member of the Florida National Guard's Joint Force Headquarters based in St. Augustine, helped make a difference in the Equal Opportunity field during a 2005-2006 deployment that would earn him national accolades.

He deployed with the 53rd Separate Infantry Brigade in 2005 to Afghanistan to form part of the coalition forces of Joint Task Force Phoenix.

"I was very happy to perform my duties and serve my country as a Soldier, and then to serve my fellow comrades-in-arms in any way I can," said Clemons. He was sent to Afghanistan to train local military personnel in establishing a professional administrative and personnel system.

Early in his deployment he had been consulted regarding equal opportunity issues by people who knew of his full-time employment with the Florida National Guard's Equal Opportunity office. Later he realized that his area was lacking an equal opportunity specialist and he brought it to the attention of his command. He was soon reassigned as the first Equal Opportunity Advisor for his task force.

"Diversity is what makes up America's Armed Forces," said Clemons. "As the Task Force Equal Opportunity Advisor, I was always pleased to help anyone who may be going through a difficult time or adjusting to any difficult situation."

In addition to handling complaints, Clemons conducted mediation sessions, ethnic observance month, sensing sessions, and climate surveys. All these are measures EO specialists take to gauge the morale of the troops and maintain the welfare of the Soldiers.

After returning from Afghanistan, Clemons was surprised to hear he was nominated and awarded the Roy Wilkins Renown Service Award by the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP) for all his work in the name of equal opportunity.

Clemons received the award in 2006 during a formal banquet hosted by the NAACP in Washington, D.C., honoring Defense Department military and civilian personnel who made outstanding contributions to equal opportunity in the armed forces.

After his deployment Clemons returned to his EO duties with the Florida National Guard.

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